

FATALITY



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, III CORPS AND FORT HOOD
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AFZF-SAFE

27 SEP 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Weapons Mishandling Caused a Soldier's Death – Fatality Memo 06-17

1. Unsafe weapon handling claimed the life of a III Corps Soldier. The Soldier just completed a squad live-fire training exercise and after returning to the assembly area, the squad leader tasked the Soldier to mount an aiming light on the NCO's M4. After completing the task, the Soldier went to return the squad leader's weapon. The Soldier then came upon two other Soldiers, made a decision to **'mess with them a little'**, raised the weapon pointing it at one of the Soldiers and squeezed the trigger. A round discharged striking the Soldier in the head killing him instantly. The investigation determined several contributing factors: the Soldier's actions were the result of overt complacency with respect to weapons handling and personal discipline, and also that the squad leader and other unit personnel failed to clear his weapon of ammunition prior to removal from the range.

2. Within III Corps, we have seen three Soldiers die as a result of accidental weapon discharge during the current Fiscal Year (FY). Army-wide, 31 accidental weapons firing (handling) have resulted in 4 fatalities and 27 injuries. For all of FY2005, the Army had 85 accidental weapon firings (handling) that caused 15 deaths and 53 injuries. Historically, the major common death or injury-producing factors in handling weapons with ammo are failure to follow procedures, improper/inadequate clearing, untimely loading/unloading of weapons, and fratricide.

3. We must ensure the highest of standards on our live ranges. This is about small unit leadership and communication. Respect for a weapon will go a long way in preventing weapons firing (handling) accidents. Safe muzzle orientation is necessary at all times. Do not become complacent when handling a weapon. Train and enforce proper weapons clearing procedures. Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.

4. Commanders must be innovative, committed, and make a difference in protecting our Soldiers. Failure to execute and enforce safe weapons handling procedures and standards is not acceptable. We must continue to mentor our Soldiers to ensure the right risk decisions are made to avoid senseless accidents as described above.

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RAYMOND T. ODIERNO
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding

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